DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 085 052 JC 740 003

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TITLE	Final Report from the Ad Hoc Committee to Study Attrition at Miami-Dade Community College, North Campus.
INSTITUTION	Miami-Dade Junior Coll., Fla.
PUB DATE	May 73
NOTE	23p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Advisory Committees; Community Colleges; *Conference Reports; *Dropout Prevention; Dropout Research; Institutional Research; Post Secondary Education; *Withdrawal

ABSTRACT

The committee is convinced that attrition is so interwoven with the entire college philosophy and operation that attempts to minimize it must be viewed as a total campus effort. The following definition of attrition was used for computing attrition at the class level: (1) all F's, (2) all withdrawals from class for students enrolled for 7 hours or more who do not simultaneously withdraw from college, and (3) all total withdrawals from college for students enrolled for 6 hours or less. Complete withdrawal of students enrolled for more than 6 hours is not included on the presumption that the causes are not directly linked to specific classes, which is the focus of this model. Research has shown the effectiveness of personalized education in minimizing attrition. The more contact students can have with individual faculty members, department chairmen and administrators, the more likely they are to be satisfied with their education and to remain in college. The committee strongly urges the campus to conduct a searching review of all policies and procedures to determine which, if any, should be revised to provide personalized education. The committee also suggests consideration be given to the formation of appropriate task forces to design strategies for implementation of those recommendations requiring more detailed planning. As many of these recommendations as possible should be implemented in the 1973-74 academic year. (Author/KM)

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FINAL REPORT FROM THE AD HOC COMMITTEE

TO STUDY ATTRITION AT MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, NORTH CAMPUS

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May, 1973

JC 740 003

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The committee is indebted to many members of the academic community within our institution and in other areas. Special acknowledgements are due to Ms. Eleanor Eyman, Director of Libraries, and her staff for providing invaluable assistance in identifying and providing research materials; to Dr. Mary Jeanette Taylor, Dean of Student Personnel Services, for providing access to the students whose contributions were significant; to the students who took the time to meet with the committee—Mary Alford, James Dawkins, Rod Espinas, Jr., Stephen Finger, and Sammy Simon—for their provocative insights; to the members of the faculty and administration for their contribution through informal interviews with individual committee members; to people at other institutions who assisted us, particularly Mr. Bruce Palmer of Foothill College for the NORCAL studies and Dr. John M. Nickins of the IRC at the University of Florida; to Ms. Grace Holden for her help in securing meeting rooms, copying documents, and carrying out many other important details; and to Ms. Beverly Filippi for typing the final draft.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, community colleges have been oriented to the open-door concept, although it is only in recent years that this concept has been implemented on a large scale. Open-door typically means that, regardless of their academic background, students may enroll in the community college and attempt to fulfill their individual educational, economic and social goals.

There has been growing concern in the last 10 to 15 years that open access may (and in many cases does) result in a revolving door for a large number of students. Reflecting this concern, several studies of attrition from community colleges have been developed on local and state levels, although it was only recently that Astin (1972) reported a nationwide study which included a sample of community colleges. His results indicated that after a four year period, about 30 to 35% of full-time, first-time-in-college-freshmen could be expected to graduate from the community college. This number is of concern to those who believe that the percentage graduating should be much higher although others think that reduction of the attrition rate cannot be expected, given the nature of the student population and the open-door concept.

Miami-Dade Community College has from its inception been concerned about the rate at which students leave before achieving some of the goals which motivated their enrollment. In the past three or four years, an increased emphasis on the concept of accountability has led to more intensive analysis of the rates of attrition within the college. At Miami-Dade, the problem is considered serious by administrators and faculty who believe that our door does in fact revolve much too rapidly for many students who

leave with feelings of unfulfillment and frustration with respect to their original goals and aspirations. There is some data to support the contention that the rate of completion of work at Miami-Dade is quite low. As one example, approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of entering students indicate that they intend to graduate from the transfer program. The facts are quite different. Of the 3,762 full-time entering freshmen for Fall Term, 1969, only 7.7% graduated by the end of the Winter Term, 1971. Thus, after two academic years, only a small percentage had achieved an A.A., A.S., or any other degree or certificate from Miami-Dade. At the end of the four year period (Fall, 1969 - Winter, 1973) a total of 31.86% of this population had graduated. This figure is comparable to that provided in the national data by Astin cited above.

Concern for the nature and pervasiveness of the problem led the North Campus administration to appoint a committee to study attrition in June, 1972. The committee was given a written charge (Appendix I) to serve as a guideline in its considerations. The committee convened and usually met weekly in order to consider both the philosophy and practical issues involved in the concept of attrition. This broad view led the committee to take into account the philosophy of Miami-Dade, the implications for the concept of attrition, and the inherent educational problems which lead to fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of student goals.

PURPOSE OF THE COMMITTEE

At any open-door community college, some students will leave the institution before they have achieved the goals for which they enrolled. Other students achieve the goals which motivated them to enroll but leave the institution without graduating. There are factors beyond the immediate control of an educational institution which contribute significantly to some students' leaving before they achieve their goals. One of the primary purposes of this committee was to explore the complex facets of student withdrawal and to make recommendations with respect to measures the campus should take in order to minimize withdrawal related to factors over which the campus does have direct control.

Neither the campus administration nor the committee considers all withdrawal from college in a negative light. Clearly, the interests of some students are better served through other institutions in our society. It is also recognized that not everyone who enters Miami-Dade intends to nor can be expected to graduate, and to hold such an unrealistic goal is detrimental to the students and to the philosophy of the institution.

The administration on this campus had made clear in a memo from the Vice President (Appendix II) to all faculty that accountability does not in any manner imply that student retention should be encouraged by the awarding of passing grades when those grades have not been earned. Accountability does mean: (1) the establishment of programs reflecting community needs; (2) the setting of goals and objectives which are realistic; (3) the development of a variety of instructional strategies to achieve these goals and objectives; and (4) the utilization of evaluative techniques which fulfill the standards of the program, reflect the strategies employed, and at the same time recognize the various communication skills and styles of the students.

DEFINITION

The committee defined attrition as the discrepancy between student expectation and attainment. This definition is subject to the following limitations and assumptions:

1. Sole reliance is placed on student expectations.
2. Expectation can be measured.
3. The campus will take necessary steps to measure student expectations by asking for information in order to assess their initial expectations. In the past this has not been done because it seemed to conflict with the open-door policy in the sense that it could be a barrier to admissions to ask students to provide more information in order to get into the college.
4. Students will frankly express their expectations and aspirations.

Inherent in the definition is an assumption that there are points beyond which attrition levels are not acceptable. This is because discrepancy between expectation and attainment may theoretically range from zero to 100 in any given case or situation and some level of acceptance must be established. The committee's deliberations led to the conclusion that decisions with respect to acceptable levels of attrition based on this definition should be established at the class level, the department level, and the division level. It was further agreed that these levels of acceptance should be initially decided as a result of the judgment of the faculty. This decision should then be negotiated with the department chairman, division director, and academic dean in order to arrive at an acceptable goal for attrition for each specific class, department and division. In addition to this, a separate acceptable level of graduation rate must be established based on the number of students who indicate their intention to graduate as compared to the number of students who actually graduate.

CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITY

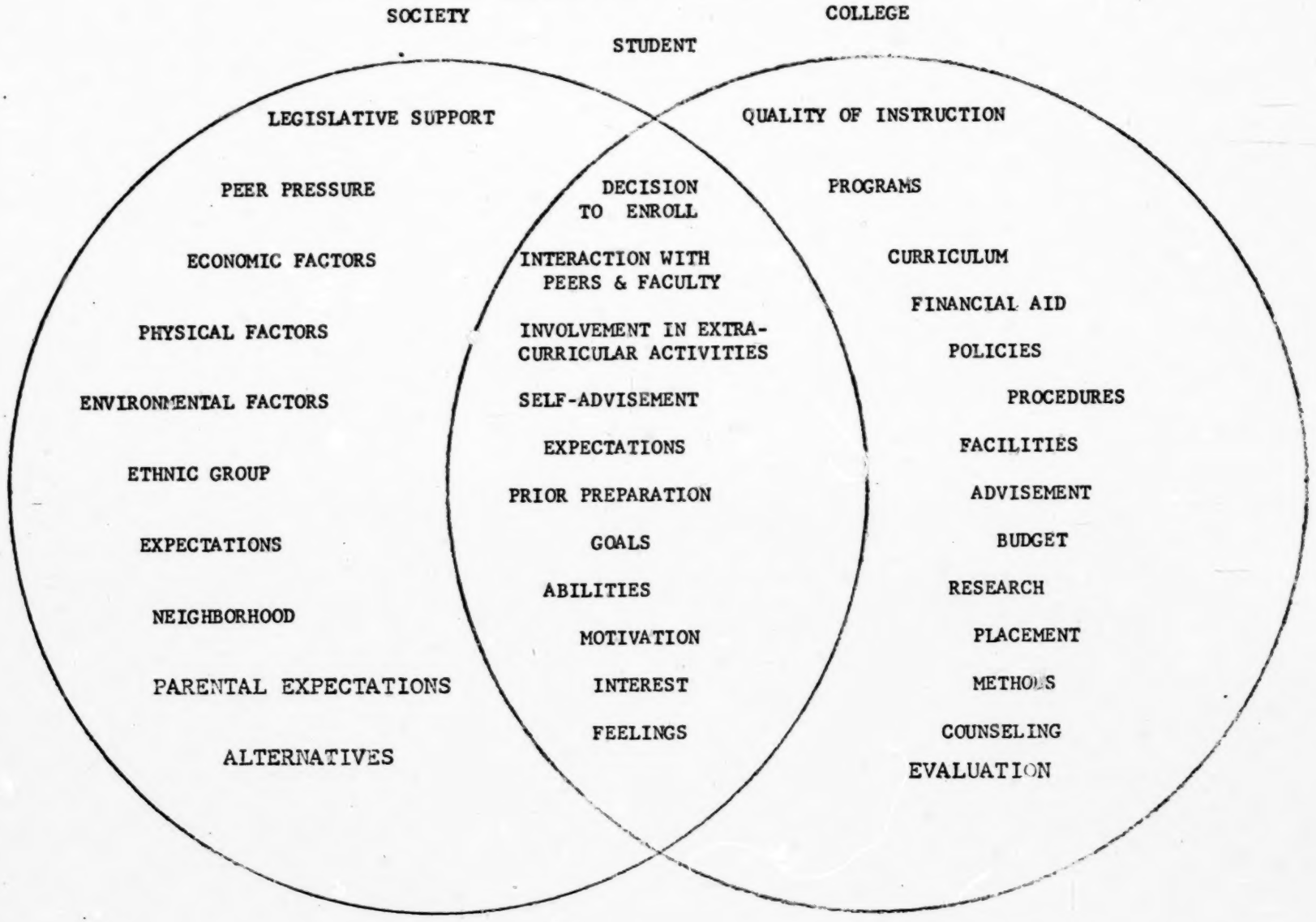
By its very nature, an open-door institution such as Miami-Dade Community College will encounter many students who leave college before their goals are realized. Since there are few requirements for admission, the student body tends to reflect a wide range of ability, motivation, expectations, and educational desire. It would be unrealistic to expect that any college could satisfy completely all the diverse demands made upon it, but it is the responsibility and duty of the college to make every effort to help the student determine his educational goals and attain them. The first responsibility for the education of students on this campus resides with those who hold administrative responsibilities. It is essential that a learning atmosphere be created which will foster intellectual and emotional growth as well as enhance the acquisition of technical skills. The Vice-President, the Dean of Academic Affairs, and the Dean of Student Personnel Services must make every effort to hire and retain faculty who are sympathetic to the needs of the students and who support the philosophy upon which the institution is built. Furthermore, administrators must be sensitive to the needs of instructors and provide them with the moral support, leadership and facilities needed to educate the students. It is also the responsibility of the administration to continually evaluate the curriculum and the faculty to insure continued effectiveness and relevance. When there is need for change, the administration must be prepared to make alterations and adjustments required in order to stimulate growth. To facilitate this, administrators need direct contact with the faculty.

Division Directors and Department Chairmen are the immediate links between the upper level administration and the instructors. They must supervise and evaluate the faculty in their day-by-day activities, acting to

create that learning atmosphere so necessary to an institution such as this—the atmosphere of close student-teacher relations. Of course, the most important responsibility is that of the teacher to the student. In the end, all other activities are futile without the cooperation and involvement of the faculty. It is the instructors who ultimately make the educational system effective and relevant, and they must accept the responsibility of using the resources of the college to help the students. This is not to suggest that faculty need shoulder the entire burden for student attrition. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the individual faculty member to utilize all his talents not only to motivate and encourage students, but also to maintain close contact with them.

The attached chart graphically depicts various factors which usually determine whether a student will continue in college until the completion of his educational goals. Since students live simultaneously in two overlapping environments, the community and the college, certain forces that will impinge on his life as a student can be identified. The students' expectations, goals, abilities, etc., are depicted as the central focus of the environmental forces. Since the degree of educational success is the result of a combination of these forces, the campus must make every effort to insure the creation of an environment in which the students can most effectively function.

FACTORS AFFECTING A STUDENT"S PERSISTENCE IN COLLEGE



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are presented on four levels: (1) Campus, (2) Division, (3) Department, (4) Faculty. This separation is made for expository and practical purposes but should not be construed to suggest a separateness in either practice or affect on students. Rather, all levels form a dynamic configuration, with any alteration of components affecting the total pattern.

I. CAMPUS LEVEL

A. Determine an acceptable level of attrition for the campus.

B. Establish a student committee on attrition to:

1. Expand peer counseling.
2. Assist in student evaluation of the faculty.
3. Make appropriate recommendations regarding the student role in minimizing attrition.

C. Design and implement methods to determine the expectations of students who plan to attend Miami-Dade Community College.

1. Expand testing and counseling procedures.
2. Allocate appropriate resources.

D. Designate an ombudsman for students.

E. Educate faculty to identify potential attrition and to appropriately intervene.

1. Redefine faculty role to include responsibility for non-academic guidance of students.
2. Publicize national and campus attrition data.
3. Implement Office of Staff and Organizational Development workshops to aid faculty in developing and applying intervention techniques. Intermix administrators, faculty and Student Personnel Services personnel in these workshops.

4. Require mid-term grade reports.

5. Develop profile of potential F and W students.

F. Modify the strategies for student orientation.

1. Require orientation of all full-time freshmen before classes begin.

2. Utilize the inputs received by the committee with respect to orientation (Appendix III and IV).

G. Develop a more accurate system for the identification of students with respect to their division, department and major.

H. Increase interaction between administrators and faculty; e.g. interface and "State of the Campus" message at an annual meeting of faculty.

I. Canvass students and faculty in night and Saturday classes to learn their needs. Design and implement appropriate methods for meeting these needs.

J. Increase articulation with the high schools.

1. Orient counselors, teachers, parents, and students to Miami-Dade Community College purpose, functions and offerings.

2. Provide additional resources for implementation.

K. Implement goals regarding hiring faculty who are representative of student minority groups.

II. DIVISION LEVEL

A. Accept and implement the definition of attrition.

B. Determine acceptable levels of attrition by division.

1. Determine current attrition by department.

2. Require divisions to develop written plans for minimizing attrition.

C. Encourage departments to do more guidance.

1. Identify students with respect to division and department.
2. Establish facilities and methods for increasing faculty/student rapport.
3. Encourage chairmen to attend staff and organizational development workshops.
4. Increase utilization of existing liaison with counseling department.
5. Encourage voluntary faculty and peer tutoring.

D. Reinforce the role of chairmen:

1. As supportive of faculty.
2. As liaison between faculty and administration.
3. As evaluators of faculty performance.

III. DEPARTMENT LEVEL

A. Promote redefined role of faculty.

1. Support student evaluation of faculty.
2. Support faculty in evaluation of appropriate line administrators.
3. Encourage and assist faculty in identifying potential attrition.
4. Assist faculty in learning intervention methods to reduce attrition (workshops, etc.)

B. Chairmen will work with faculty to determine acceptable level of attrition by program and course.

C. Assist faculty in monitoring key indicators of student attrition such as attendance, attention in class, application (effort).

D. Increase emphasis on continuous evaluation of faculty.

IV. FACULTY LEVEL

A. In accordance with Campus Objective No. 4, provide students with goals, objectives, evaluation methods and other course information in writing with a verbal explanation.

B. Keep students informed of their progress through personal contact, informed peer evaluation, tests and projects, etc., in addition to a formal mid-term evaluation provided to students.

C. Inform students of available support services and suggest referral, when appropriate, to services such as financial aid, counseling, special library services, placement, etc.

D. Participate in workshops, conferences, etc., to expand repertoire of intervention techniques to reduce attrition in classes.

E. Utilize office hours to assist students in identifying their personal goals and objectives.

SUMMARY

The deliberations over the last few months have convinced the committee that the concept and treatment of attrition cannot be viewed as occuring as a single event, but rather is so interwoven with the entire college and campus philosophy and operation that attempts to minimize attrition must be viewed as a total effort and related to all personnel, policies and procedures.

The committee previously elaborated on its preferred definition of attrition, and believes that eventually such a definition should be put into effect throughout the campus. However, from a realistic point of view, such an all-inclusive approach to assessing students' expectations upon entrance, and using these as a base line for measuring attrition, will not likely occur in the immediate future. Since this is the case, the committee believes that on a short range, the campus should adopt another definition of attrition. After reviewing several models (Appendix V), the committee decided to use the following one for computing attrition at the class level: (a) all F's. (b) all withdrawals from class (W's) for students enrolled for 7 hours or more who do not simultaneously withdraw totally from college, and (c) all total withdrawals from college (WD's) for students enrolled for 6 hours or less. Complete withdrawal from college of students enrolled for more than 6 hours are not included on the presumption that the causes for such withdrawals are not directly linked to specific classes which is the focus of this model.

The total withdrawals of students carrying more than 6 credit hours ignored in this model for class attrition would, of course, be included in the computation of attrition at the campus level using a different model. Using this model, the attrition rate for a hypothetical class would be calculated as follows:

1. Enrollment as of second class roll = 40

2. End-of-term grade distribution:

A	B	C	D	F	W	WD
3	6	10	3	3	8	7

3. Of the W's, 3 had enrolled for 7 credit hours or more and did not totally withdraw from college; 3 others totally withdrew from college and another 2 carried less than 7 credit hours. Therefore, only 3 count toward attrition.
4. Of the 7 WD's, 3 were enrolled for 6 credit hours or less.
5. Summary: 3 F + 3 W + 3 WD = 9 and the attrition rate for this class would be 23%.

Models for computing attrition at the department, program and division levels can best be developed by the faculties and administrators directly concerned.

This definition, if accepted, should be formalized by the Academic Dean and presented to the Division Directors and the Department Chairmen for their review and consideration. After formal adoption of this definition a computer program should be written so that for each term for each class the same definition is applied and printouts provided to Chairmen, Directors and the Dean. This will provide an exact percentage of attrition according to this model.

With respect to control, responsibility and intervention techniques, it is the committee's opinion that there exists sufficient data from the research literature to point the direction for adequate measures in these areas. For example, one of the principles which is found pervasively throughout the literature is the effectiveness of personalized education. Operationally, this appears to mean that the more contact students can have with individual faculty members, department chairmen and administrators on a face-to-face basis, the more likely they are to be satisfied in their educational experience

and to remain in college. The NORCAL study (Appendix X) particularly details a number of intervention techniques attempted at several California colleges, the results of which all point to the improvement in retention when counseling is used extensively. Increased counseling is one of the techniques which fits under the general rubric of more personalized education. With respect to other aspects of personalized education, the reactions of students who were invited to make comments about attrition are significant (Appendix III). Each of the students, independently, stressed the need for a more complete "orientation to the college." Some suggested orientation prior to registration, some suggested changes in the orientation program. This consensus expression of need for more personalized early contact indicates that this is an area requiring more emphasis than it is presently receiving. In this instance, emphasis means planning and reallocation of resources to more effectively meet an expressed need.

The committee feels that any policies and procedures which do not foster personalized education contribute in some measure to attrition. Therefore, the committee strongly urges the campus to conduct a searching review of all currently effective policies and procedures in order to determine which, if any, should be revised to provide an optimal environment for personalized education for students.

In conclusion, the committee suggests consideration be given to the formation of appropriate task forces to design strategies for implementation of those recommendations which require more detailed planning. As many of these recommendations as possible should be implemented in the 1973-74 academic year.

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